Appendix 1

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Herefordshire Council

28 May 2026

Feedback

Corporate Peer Challenge

Contents

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk
Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577

1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during 23-26 June 2025 and promptly published the full report with an action plan.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately ten months after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Receive feedback from peers on the early progress made by the council against the CPC recommendations and the council's RAG rated CPC Action Plan.
- Consider peers' reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date

The LGA would like to thank Herefordshire Council for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at Herefordshire Council took place (onsite) on 28th May 2026.

The Progress Review focussed on the key recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge. These are set out in section 3 along with the peer teams feedback on the council's progress over the last year.

For this Progress Review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Richard Flinton Chief Executive North Yorkshire Council
- Cllr David Fothergill Conservative member, Somerset Council (replaced Philip Broadhead who stood down as a councillor in 2025)
- Eamon Lally, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk
Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577
Chair: Councillor Eamonn O'Brien **Chief Executive (Interim):** Jenny Rowlands **President:** Baroness Grey-Thompson

3. Progress Review - Feedback

The CPC made 5 key recommendations and a number of supplementary recommendations. The council, in addressing these recommendations, undertook or is undertaking 24 actions. In the council's progress review statement, the RAG rated action plan reports that 100 per cent of actions have been completed or are on schedule for completion.

The peer team welcome the opportunity to return to Herefordshire Council to see what progress the council has made over the past year in meeting the recommendations from the original CPC Report. At the CPC held in June 2025 the peer team recognised that Herefordshire is a good council that is striving hard to improve further. Our observation, that it benefits from a strong sense of place, a maturing political culture and a growing confidence in its leadership, was reinforced during the return visit on 28 May 2026.

The council has made further progress in the last year. Significantly the council received an Ofsted rating of overall 'good' for its children's services, which represents an enormous amount of work by the council over a number of years. The new transport hub in Hereford is nearly complete. Progress has been made on the initial phase of the Hereford bypass, with contractors appointed to carry out extensive design and technical development work. The eventual aim of the bypass it to relieve congestion in the city and to open up land for 14,000 new homes and 150 hectares of employment land. The council's cabinet is due to decide, on 10 September 2026, on the award of the construction contract for phase one of the bypass.

3.1 Key Recommendation 1: Now need to focus on corporate transformation and provide the resources needed to deliver.

In addition, the following was recommended:

- Provide a clear transformation delivery plan. More work is needed to communicate the balance between future investment in, and savings from transformation and how this is tied in with the MTFS. A clearly articulated delivery plan is needed which sets out the investment required and the profile of savings from that investment

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk

The council has delivered a number of projects which support its transformation aims. For example, it has implemented a new content management system and a new telephony system. It has also completed pilots and rolled out phase 1 of Magic Notes software, and it is implementing a new performance management system. However, transformation is still at an early stage. The work done so far is helping the council to catch up on what is an important agenda for all councils. It is encouraging that the governance around transformation has been strengthened. There is a now a corporate director lead and a senior board to oversee this work. The council has also appointed a chief digital and information officer to lead the transformation activity. This appointment is an important one as the council's ambition for transformation makes clear:

'*Build on what we have achieved so far, to become a customer-centred, digital and insight-led council. We will modernise the way we work, embrace technology and data, and fix the basics to improve our services so they are more accessible, efficient and meet the challenging expectations of residents'.*

Greater clarity has emerged on the themes that the council's transformation will focus on: the customer; the way the organisation works; and transforming the basics. The council has a clear vision and it has established the design principles for this work. Bringing the council up to date in its use of technology is undoubtedly important, but equally the council will need to ensure that the culture of the organisation reflects the new ways of working.

In its CPC report the peer team recognised that service level transformation had been taking place, but that a focus on corporate transformation was needed an that resources would be required. Transformation capacity is still small and it will require deft management to bring in resources, as required, to achieve outcomes. In the peer teams CPC report, the team noted that it was important to provide a clear transformation delivery plan, but this is not yet in place. A programme plan is required to enable a good understanding of when additional resources will be needed and to link savings from transformation into the medium-term financial strategy.

The council has yet to go live with its latest approach to transformation; there is a

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk
Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577

sense that after so many start-stop efforts in the past, transformation requires a sustained programme and the council wants to get this right. The peer team found a good degree of awareness among staff of the need for transformation. There was also an awareness that there was a change in approach, which was characterised by staff as 'the council taking control' following the work undertaken by consultants. The peer team consider that the approach to transformation is now much more authentically Herefordshire.

3.2 Key Recommendation 2: Use of data must be improved so that insights can flow to support service improvement and framing the scope of the transformation programme. There are lots of examples where this is taking place elsewhere and the council should draw on the experience of others to support this development.

In addition, the following was recommended:

- Strengthen corporate insight and data capability. While directorates demonstrate strong performance monitoring, the council should invest in corporate capacity to analyse data and generate cross-cutting insights. This will support more strategic decision-making and enable a clearer line of sight between performance, risk, and improvement.

We said in our peer challenge report that 'Use of data must be improved so that insights can flow to support service improvement and framing the scope of the transformation programme.' Work has gone into improving some performance management systems and the corporate performance and intelligence function has been reformed. The council has the right ambition but there is still a lot of work to be done in this area. The Council has procured a new performance management system (InPhase). This should enable the council to monitor strategic, operational and service level performance in one place and allow for data to be analysed more regularly and at a faster pace. Training on the new performance management system has been provided to staff and this should aid conversations about performance within the council, as the system generates greater transparency, and enhance the culture of continuous improvement. Turning performance data into insights and service design on a consistent basis is still work in progress and the council will want

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk

to ensure that it has the capacity and capability to achieve this to improve outcomes for communities. We note above that the council has taken control of its transformation, but it should still look outward to those councils who are further along on the journey to generating insights from data and understanding the impact of the council's services. As at March 2026 the council reported that for Q3, 80 % of the delivery plan milestones for 2025/26 were completed or were on track and that only one of its top 10 indicators, 'number of people rough sleeping', was RAG rated red (away from target by more than 10%).

The improved public interface in public realm is an example where the council is starting to get to grips with performance and service delivery improvement. In this broad service area, the council has launched a single direct online platform which replaces multiple websites and phone numbers.

3.3 **Key Recommendation 3: Carry out planned refresh of MTFS and provide some scenario planning for future years.**

In addition, the following was recommended:

- Tightly manage the delivery of savings in 2025/26. The council has not delivered all planned savings in the past and it will want to ensure that programmes are robust and that the savings earmarked for 2025/26 are delivered.

The council's finances continue to be well managed. The council continues to deliver balanced outturn positions. The peer team noted in its CPC report that the council needed to manage tightly the delivery of savings in 2025/26. The council delivered £13.2 mil in savings in 2025/26 which was 84% of its target. That represented all of the approved savings for 2025/26 and 78% of the brought forward savings from previous years. The peer team was told that the savings challenge from 2026/27 to 2029/30 would continue to be tough. The outcome of the fair funding review reduces the council's allocation of funding from central government by £17.3 mil over the multi-year settlement period and the council will be looking for around £32 million in savings over this period. Continuing to achieve balanced budgets is everyone's responsibility, both elected Members and officers. A limited level of reserves means

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk

there is little scope for delays, or failure, in delivering current savings plans. It bodes well that the finance team's efforts to engage with staff to provide briefings so that staff understand the strategic financial position of the council are well received.

In its CPC report the peer team highlighted the need for the council to provide scenario planning for future years as early as possible. The peer team were told that work had been underway on scenarios for 2027/28 since April 2026.

3.4 Key Recommendation 4: Strengthen and stabilise the internal capacity to overcome challenges in the thin-client model of delivery.

In addition, the following were recommended:

- Strengthen in-house capacity to deliver change. As the council seeks to transform and improve its service offer and achieve a long term sustainable financial position the council should consider strengthening its in-house capacity to oversee transformation, contractual and service change and improvement.
- Take advantage of the Voluntary sector's appetite to deliver. The council can ensure that the value of the voluntary sector as a delivery partner is recognised and acted upon across the council.

In the CPC report the peer team noted that the council would need to raise its internal capacity to manage contractors. Public Realm services moved back under council control on 1 June 2026, marking the start of a new chapter for highways and public realm services under a new model designed to give greater control and improved outcomes for residents. 53 staff have transferred into the council from the previous contractor to support the new model.

While this is an important step, the peer team consider that, given the council's ambition, there is a risk that capacity and capability constraints will hamper effective delivery and the council will need to be alive to when it is sensible to bring in extra resources.

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk
Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577
Chair: Councillor Eamonn O'Brien **Chief Executive (Interim):** Jenny Rowlands **President:** Baroness Grey-Thompson

The Peer team noted in its CPC report that the voluntary and community sector was very keen to support service delivery. The council is now establishing a commissioning framework for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector which will be used initially within the community wellbeing directorate. It will be important to monitor the impact of the framework.

3.5 **Key Recommendation 5: Partners are very supportive, and the council can build on this to develop strategic engagement with the voluntary sector and others to help deliver services.**

In addition, the following were recommended:

- Lead the devolution debate locally. The national move is towards a greater focus on the role of strategic authorities, which is the route through which the government is pursuing devolution. It will be important for the council to lead, shape and seize opportunities on devolution in the sub-region. In doing so it should also continue to lobby government for a more flexible and sympathetic approach to supporting the opportunities associated with closer cross-border relationships.
- Focus the chief executives' board on delivery. It is relatively new but is well regarded and the council should take the opportunity to use to group to improve services through a focus on delivery and public service reform.
- Clarify and communicate growth leadership. The council should provide clearer and more visible leadership on its growth agenda, ensuring alignment across strategies and partnerships. This includes strengthening the role of the Business Board and clearly articulating the council's role in delivering the Herefordshire Big Economic Plan.
- Embed partnership working across the council. The council has a strong commitment to partnership working and it should build on the strength of individual senior relationships to develop a structured approach to partnership working across the organisation.

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk
Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577
Chair: Councillor Eamonn O'Brien **Chief Executive (Interim):** Jenny Rowlands **President:** Baroness Grey-Thompson

In the CPC report, the peer team noted that partners were very supportive and that the council could build on this.

Herefordshire council carries out partnership working across sectors through a range of groupings including the Business Growth Board the Skills Board and Economy and Place Board. There is also the Herefordshire CEOs' group which brings together public sector CEOs from across the county. In its CPC report the peer team called on the council to use the CEOs' group to focus on delivery and the council is moving this forward through a series of deep dives into key county topics. The peer team also heard that the CEOs' group was being replicated at the director and heads of service level which will provide structure for, and deepen, cross organisational working, which was a peer team recommendation.

In terms of growth leadership, the peer team called on the council to strengthen the role of the Business Board. The peer team was pleased to see that since its last visit the Business Board has led on the review of the Herefordshire Economic Plan and has developed a delivery plan. The Business Board has also become active in the devolution agenda, meeting with business organisations in prospective foundational strategic authority partner areas and writing to Minsters in support of the three-county proposal (Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire).

Herefordshire council is playing a leading role in the devolution discussions. From a Hereford perspective the three counties approach makes a lot of sense, but there are real challenges to getting this over the line. Representations to government from Gloucestershire indicate a preference for the establishment of a county wide strategic authority with the aim of joining the West of England Combined Authority. Herefordshire will need to continue its leadership role on this issue and will also need to worth through other potential devolution options.

3.6 Adult Social Care

On the day that the Peer team undertook the progress review the council received the disappointing and frustrating result of its recent CQC inspection which rated the service as 'Requires Improvement'. However, within the CQC judgement there were

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk

some good messages for the council including that ‘Staff were passionate about supporting people in Herefordshire.’ It is worth pulling out some of the comments from the CQC report because they speak to the corporate health of the organisation. CQC noted that: “There were clear governance, management and accountability arrangements at all levels within the local authority. These included corporate leadership functions, the Health Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and Health and Wellbeing Board. The local authority's schemes of delegation for Care Act duties were clear and publicly available, supporting transparency in decision making and clear accountability.”

On safeguarding the CQC stated ‘National data indicated that people in Herefordshire felt safe. Safeguarding processes were clear and concerns were triaged quickly.’

Responding to the CQC judgement will be a significant priority for the council. As in all councils, demand for adult social care services continues to increase, cases are more complex and finances remain constrained. Improving the adult social care service will be challenging and will require a lot of member and managerial time. The peer team was encouraged by the staff’s response to the judgement; staff were measured in their response and ready for the challenge.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank Herefordshire Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review.

We appreciate that senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Helen Murray (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the authority

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk
Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577

and the Local Government Association (LGA) and their e-mail address is helen.murray@local.gov.uk

Further information, support, and resources on LGR/Devolution, can be found on the LGA's devolution and LGR Hub website.

18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ www.local.gov.uk **Telephone** 020 7664 3000 **Email** info@local.gov.uk
Local Government Association company number 11177145 Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 03675577
Chair: Councillor Eamonn O'Brien **Chief Executive (Interim):** Jenny Rowlands **President:** Baroness Grey-Thompson